
**VANDENBERG AIR FORCE BASE
INSTALLATION RESTORATION PROGRAM
COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD
PACIFIC COAST CLUB, 758 NEBRASKA AVENUE
07 FEBRUARY 2002**

Ms. Beatrice Kephart, Chief, Environmental Restoration, called the Vandenberg Air Force Base (AFB) Community Advisory Board (CAB) meeting to order at 1000 hours. Col. Strathearn and Dr. Roger Welt presented their opening remarks. Col. Strathearn congratulated Ms. Kephart on winning the Air Force Environmental Award. She is now in the running to receive the environmental award for the entire Department of Defense. Congratulations and good luck Ms. Kephart!

A video developed by the 30th Communications Squadron was played for the CAB. This video presented dynamic launch footage as well as highlights of the Guardian Challenge and other 2001 events. Vandenberg AFB received a rating of *excellent*, across the board, at the 2001 Inspector General's basewide inspection. Vandenberg AFB also received a prestigious award for best launch operations in the Air Force Space Command at last year's Guardian Challenge missile competition.

Following the video presentation, Ms. Kephart outlined the meeting's agenda:

- Installation Restoration Program Overview;
- Environmental Assessment for Upcoming Missile Test;
- Document Review;
- Plant Mitigation Efforts;
- Bishop Pine Forest; and
- Member Comments.

Installation Restoration Program Overview

Ms. Kephart introduced Ms. Sharon Stone, Air Force Space Command Environmental Office. Ms. Stone was instrumental in securing and submitting Vandenberg's IRP funding for this fiscal year. A total of \$8.9M was authorized and received in mid-January. The IRP staff is working with AFCEE to award contracts for: remedial investigation (RI) work at Site 5 (SLC-3); remedial action construction at Site 1, Base Exchange Service Station; interim removal action and completion of RI/Feasibility Study (FS) at Site Cluster 8, 9, & 10, SLC-4; completion of a number of RI/FSs; and new projects to investigate Site 45, Basewide Underground Storage Tanks (USTs). Ms. Kephart stated that the investigation phase of the majority of the IRP sites is nearing completion. The focus will now be on site cleanup.

Ms. Kephart updated the CAB on the Ecological Risk Assessments. Vandenberg and the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) reached a resolution on the approach for establishing toxicity reference values (TRVs) for Vandenberg AFB. The DTSC committed to complete their review of all Vandenberg's TRVs by the end of March 2002. The TRVs will be peer reviewed by Dr. Barry Wilson from the University of California-Davis. The peer review is scheduled to be completed at the beginning of March. Once Vandenberg receives the final list of TRVs from the regulators, Tetra Tech, Inc. (a contractor) will complete ecological risk assessments for all sites basewide.

Environmental Assessment for Upcoming Missile Tests

Ms. Kephart addressed the CAB about a recent newspaper article concerning the upcoming missile defense tests that was published on 21 January 2002 in the *Santa Barbara News Press*. This was in response to Mr. Mel O'Campo, who inquired about the article. The article indicated that a San Luis Obispo-based Citizen Opposition to Rocket Pollution "says it is just these types of launches that it wants to stop..." This group opposes these types of launches because they believe the launches emit harmful chemicals into the environment. Ms. Kephart explained that one chemical of concern, deuterium fluoride, is a tracer element that is used to help the military verify if interception occurred high above the Pacific Ocean. The U.S. Army and Missile Defense Command prepared the Environmental Assessment (EA) and considered 14 environmental elements. This one chemical of concern was determined to have little or no impact on the environment because of the relatively small amount of the chemical involved in each launch.

The EA for these upcoming ballistic missile defense tests is available for public review and comment at the Santa Maria and Lompoc Public Libraries. Comments are due by 13 February 2002.

Document Review

Dr. Linda Fargo, a member of the CAB, has formed a document review subcommittee to provide input and comments on behalf of the CAB. The Engineering Evaluation/Cost Analysis (EE/CA) for Stormwater Erosion Mitigation at Site 20 was the first document sent to the subcommittee for review. This document will be available to the general public in mid-February. The review subcommittee will be provided at least two weeks to review the documents. More time will be allocated if the schedule permits.

Plant Mitigation Efforts

Dr. Chris Gillespie, the base botanist, briefed the CAB on various plant species that have been listed by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as endangered or have proposed critical habitat on or in the vicinity of Vandenberg AFB. These species include La Graciosa thistle, beach layia, Gambel's watercress, Gaviota tarplant, and Lompoc yerba santa. In order for the base to maintain mission readiness, compliance with the USFWS in preserving the habitats for these plant species is necessary and important.

The La Graciosa thistle does not occur on Vandenberg AFB, however, the plant did grow here at one time. It was first discovered near Orcutt in 1907. Today, the largest population of La Graciosa thistle is found at the mouth of the Santa Maria River. Since the USFWS has proposed an area of critical habitat for this plant, the base will continue to survey areas for this species.

Beach layia was first listed as endangered in 1995. The plant was found on Vandenberg AFB south of Surf Beach in 1929. It has been most prevalent in Los Angeles and Humboldt Counties, as it thrives in dune-like areas. However, Beach layia has been found growing along the shoulders of many paved roads on Vandenberg AFB. Because of this, construction and IRP projects have been steered around areas where this plant has been sighted.

Gambel's watercress was first discovered on Vandenberg AFB in 1980 by a USFWS inventory of the Barka Slough area. Because Gambel's watercress requires a large amount of water, the plant was not found again until 1998 when a survey was conducted near the Guadalupe Dunes and Black Lake areas. Dr. Gillespie stated that this species is not easily identified, as it is similar to many other types of watercress plants. Therefore, on Vandenberg AFB, it is possible it may have been bred out of existence.

The Gaviota tarplant was listed as endangered by the USFWS approximately 2 or 3 years ago. The plant is found mostly in Gaviota, where the plant originally got its name. The Gaviota tarplant was not known

to exist near Vandenberg AFB, until it was found off base near Oak Mountain. This area near SLC-6 has been proposed as a critical habitat for this plant species.

Lastly, the Lompoc yerba santa is a local plant first found in 1932 by Mr. Ralph Hoffman. In 1997, designation of a critical habitat area was first considered for the Lompoc yerba santa. A small population of this plant exists near 35th Street and Pine Canyon. That habitat is the only one to exist on federal property. The reason for this is that the species does not reproduce by seed. Due to its lack of genetic material, the only way for this species to reproduce is if another habitat is close enough so that it can clone itself. More information about this plant can be found at the Santa Barbara Natural History Museum.

Bishop Pine Forest

Dr. Gillespie briefed the CAB on the Bishop Pine forest, which occupies approximately 500 acres on Vandenberg AFB. The southernmost strands of Bishop Pine forests in California occur in the Lompoc-Orcutt areas. These types of pines are relatively short-lived, living only up to 80 years. The oldest Bishop Pine tree found on Vandenberg AFB is 72 years old. They are extremely fire adapted and have better success reproducing after wildfires or controlled burns as the cones open to release seeds due to the high heat. Vandenberg AFB has included the Bishop Pine trees in their burn plans, and has planted several hundreds of these trees as part of a reforestation effort on North Vandenberg AFB. Unfortunately, these trees are very susceptible to fungal disease, with the infestation of one tree frequently resulting in the devastation of the whole forest. At this time, however, these trees are not endangered.

A tour of the Bishop Pine forest on South Vandenberg AFB was offered to the CAB members following the meeting. Dr. Gillespie provided more information about these trees on the tour.

Member Questions/Comments

Mr. Ron Fink requested that an update of the snowy plover breeding season be discussed at the next CAB meeting. Col. Strathearn informed the CAB that the beaches will open earlier this year, and that the base will be implementing an aggressive docent program during next year's nesting season. Mr. Fink, a volunteer docent, announced that there is a need for more docents and recommends volunteering. The commitment is only 3.5 hours per week, and a worthwhile experience to anyone interested. Interested parties may phone 737-7700 for more information or to volunteer. More information about the details of beach access due to the snowy plover breeding season will be presented at the next CAB meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 1200. The next CAB meeting will be held at the Lompoc Center, Allan Hancock College, on June 6, 2002.